REMINISCENCE OF PITTSBURGH

By

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The elevation of the Duke of Orleans to the throne of France recalls some early recollections, and if you will indulge me in the privilege of the fair Sheherezade, of being discursive, and of digressing as much as I please, a paragraph or two is at your service.

It was probably in 1799 or in 1800 that this distinguished personage accompanied by his two brothers, Montpensier and Beaujolais, came to the western country. On arriving in Pittsburgh, then a small village, they found one or two émigrés, who had formerly filled prominent stations under the ancienne régime, who were now earning a scanty subsistence in carrying on some little business of merchandise. One of them, the Chevalier duBac, one of the worthiest of men, and an admirable philosopher, kept a little shop, then denominated, par excellence, a confectionery. The articles, and the only ones, by the way, entitling the chevalier's establishment to this attractive name, were the kernels of hazelnuts, walnuts and peach stones, enclosed in an envelope of burnt maple sugar, fabricated by the skilful hands of the chevalier himself. DuBac was the most popular citizen of the village; he had a monkey of admirable qualities, and his pointer (Sultan), could, like the dog of the Arabian Nights, tell counterfeit money from good; at least, the honest folks who supplied our little market with chickens and butter thought so, and that was the same thing. It was amusing to hear the master of the shop calling his two familiars to aid him in selecting the good from the bad, "'leven penny-bitts." "Allons Sultan, tell dese good ladie de good money from de counterfeit." Then followed the important consultation between the dog and the monkey; Pug grinned and scratched his sides; Sultan smelt and in due time scraped the money

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into the drawer. As there were no counterfeit “leven-pences” Sultan seldom failed.—“Madame,” would my friend say to the blowzy country lass, “Sultan is like de Pope, he is in-falliable.”—Sultan and Bijou laid the foundation of this excellent man’s fortune.—they brought crowds of custom to the shop; and in two or three years he was enabled to convert his little business into a handsome fancy store. An attraction was then added to the establishment which diverted a portion of the public admiration from Sultan and the monkey; this was a Dutch clock with a goodly portion of gilding, and two or three white and red figures in front; before striking it played a waltz. It was inestimable; this music had never been heard in the west, and those who have been brought up amidst the everlasting grinding of our present museums can have no conception of the excitement caused by our chevalier’s clock. In those days every unique piece of furniture or rare toy was believed to have formed a part of the spolia opima of the French revolution, and most generally they were set down as the property of the Queen of France. It was soon insinuated abroad that the Chevalier’s clock formed one of the rare ornaments of the Boudoir of the unfortunate Maria Antoinette. When he was asked how much it cost, he evaded the question with admirable casuistry. “Ah, mon ami,” he would say with sincere tristease, “the French revolution produce some terrible effect; it was worth fifteen hundred francs guiney.” That, and the dog and the monkey were worth to the chevalier 15,000 dollars, for he realized this sum in a few years, from a foundation of a few pounds of sugar and a peck of hazelnuts.

Such was the chevalier DuBac in his Magazin, and he was a perfect illustration of the French character of that day; it would accommodate itself to any situation in life; it enabled the Minister of Marine to become, like Bedredden, a pastry cook, and young Egalite, the present King of France, a schoolmaster in Canada. But this is only one side of the picture; DuBac, when he closed his shop, and entered into society, was the delight of his auditory; he was an accomplished scholar, possessed the most polished manners and habits of “lavieille cour.” He was a younger son or as the French people call it, he was the ‘cadet’ of a noble family.
He had traveled much and observed profoundly. He had been to the 'Holy Land,' not exactly as a plamer, but being 'attache' a la legation Francaise' at Constantinople, of which his relation, Sauf Boeuf, was the head, he took the opportunity of traveling through as much of Asia as was usually examined by European travelers.

Such was my early friend DuBac, to whose instructions and fine belles lettres acquirements I am indebted for some of the most unalloyed enjoyments of my life, by opening to me some of the richest treasurers of French literature; and such was the man whom the sons of Orleans found in a frontier American village. I do not remember the definite destination of the interesting strangers; but certain it is, that the chevalier DuBac induced them to while away a much longer period in Pittsburgh than could have been their original intention. He proposed to General Neville, whose house was always the temple of hospitality, where he was in the habit of dining every Sunday, and at whose table and fireside the unfortunate emigre was sure to find a hearty welcome, to introduce the travelers. The General at first received the proposition with sadness. He said he had been a soldier of the Revolution, the intimate of Rochambeau and Lafayette, and of course entertained a feeling of the deepest respect for the memory of the unfortunate Louis, not as a monarch, but as a most amiable and virtuous man. He insisted that no good could spring from the infamous exciter of the Jacobins, the profligate Egalite. "Mais mon General, (said the chevalier, with a shrug of the shoulders, and most melancholy contortion of his wrinkled features,) ils sont dans la plus grande misere, et ils ont ete chasse, comme nous autres, par ces vilains sans culottes." The chevalier knew his man and his bon hommie of the General prevailed. "Eh! bien! chevalier, allezrendre nos devoirs aux voyageurs, et qu'ils dinent chez nous demain." The strangers accepted the courtesy, and became intimate with him and attached to the family of the kind hearted American; the charms of the conversation of the Duke of Orleans, and his various literary attainments, soon obliterated for the moment the horrible career of his father from the minds of his hearers. If my boyish recollection is faithful, he was rather taciturn, and melancholy; he would be perfectly abstracted from conversa-
tion, sometimes for half an hour, looking steadfastly at the coal fire that blazed in the grate, and when roused from his reverie, he would apologize for this breach of bienseance, and call one of the children who were learning French to read to him. On these occasions I have read to him many passages selected by him, from Telemaque; the beautiful manner in which he read the description of Calypso’s Grotto is still fresh in my memory. He seldom adverted to the scenes of the revolution, but he criticised the battles of that period, particularly that of Jemmapes, with such discrimination as to convince the military men of Pittsburgh, of whom there were several, that he was peculiarly fitted to shine in the profession of arms.

Montpensier, the second brother, has left no mark on the tablet of memory by which I can recall him; but Beaujolais, the young and interesting Beaujolais, is still before my mind’s eye. There was something romantic in his character, and Madame deGenis’ romance, the ‘Knights of the Swan,’ in which that charming writer so beautifully apostrophises her young ward, had just prepared every youthful bosom to lean towards this accomplished boy. He was tall and graceful, and playful as a child. He was a universal favorite.—He was a few years older than myself; but when together, we appeared to be of the same age. A transient blush of melancholy would occasionally pass over his fine features, in the midst of his gayest amusements, but it disappeared quickly, like the white cloud of summer. We then ascribed it to a boyish recollection of the luxuries and splendors of the Palais Royal, in which he had passed his early life, which he might be contrasting with the simple domestic scene which was passing before him. It was, however, probably in some measure imputable to the first sensation of that disease, which, in a few short years afterwards, carried him to his grave.

One little circumstance made a singular impression on me. I was standing one day with this group of Frenchmen, on the bank of the Monongahela, when a countryman of theirs, employed in the quarter master department, as a laborer in taking care of flat boats, passed by. Perre Cabot, or, as he was familiarly called, French Peter, was dressed in a blanket capot, with a hood in place of a hat, in the manner
of the Canadian boatmen, and in moccasins. DuBac called after him, and introduced him to the French princes.—The scene presented a subject for moralising even for a boy; on the banks of the Ohio, and in exile, the representative of the first family of a nation who held rank of higher importance than any other nation in Europe, took by the hand in a friendly and familiar conversation, his countryman, whose lot was cast among the dregs of the people, and who would not have aspired to the honor of letting down the steps of the carriage of the man with whom he here stood on the level.

Peter was no Jacobin—he had emigrated from France before the philanthropic Robespierre and his colleagues had enlightened their fellow citizens and opened their eyes to the propriety of vulgar brutality and ferocity. Honest Cabot, therefore, felt all the love and veneration for the Princes, which Frenchmen under the old regime never failed to cherish for members of the "grand monarque". I was a great favorite with old Peter. The next time I met him, he took me in his arms, and exclaimed, with tears in his eyes,—"Savezvous, mon enfant. ce qui m'est arrive? j'ai en Pho-

The brothers, on quitting Pittsburgh, left a most favorable impression on the minds of the little circle in which they were received so kindly. The recollection of the amiable Beaujolais was particularly cherished; and when the news of his death in Sicily, a few years after, reached the west, the family circle of General Neville expressed the sincerest sorrow.

The Chevalier DuBac after realizing a snug fortune by industry and economy removed to Philadelphia, to have the opportunity of mingling more with his countrymen. On the restoration of the Bourbons, his friends induced him to return to France, to resume the former rank of his family. But it was too late, the philosophical emigrant had lived too long in American seclusion to relish the society of Paris, or habits had changed too much to be recognized by him.—The following is a translation of a paragraph from one of his letters to his old friend, the late General Neville, soon after his arrival in Paris.

"I am again on the stage, where the delightful days of
my early youth were passed; but, my dear General, I am not happy—I feel like the old man in one of your English tales, forty years of whose life had been spent in prison, and who had been discharged by the clemency of a new monarch, only to find that all his relatives and friends were dead, and that his own name had been forgotten; he begged the emperor to recommit him to his prison. I find myself actually sighing for the little circle of your family, and for my little magazine upon the banks of LaBelle Riviere. I am a stranger in Paris, unknowing and unknown. I am surrounded by new faces, new names, new titles, and what is more embarrassing, by new manners. What a change! The metamorphosis is worthy of the pen of Ovid—it is the transformation of the lovely and graceful nymph into the rough and rigid tree. You may accuse me of speaking like a Frenchman, but I cannot help saying that the elegance and polish of French society, so long the glory of the world, is gone forever. The few gray-headed specimens of the old court, like myself, who have returned, are insufficient to restore it. We have soirees now, but the charms of the "petits-soupers" are no more to be found. Music has not retrograded, certainly; but dancing, my dear sir, except on the stage, is nothing like what it was bono sub Ludovico. Yet do not understand me as meaning to convey the idea that, on the whole, things are no better. That wonderful man who is sent to St. Helena, although a tyrant of the first order, will have many of his sins forgiven him in this world for the liberal encouragement he gave to the arts, sciences and literature. More correct notions of government are cherished, and if the old royalists will only encourage the new king to adopt and appreciate the vast changes in society and thinking, all will go well; but I acknowledge, my dear friend, that I doubt the prudence and common sense of my old friends, particularly of those who remained in Europe. As a patriot and philosopher, I must bear witness to the improvement and advancement of my country since the revolution: as a man, however, I cannot but mourn; the storm has not left a single shrub of my once numerous family; the guillotine has drunk the blood of all my race; and I now stand on the verge of the grave, the dust of a name whose pride it once was to trace in history, thro' all the distinguished scenes of French
history, for centuries back. With the eloquent savage, Logan, whose speech you have so often read to me, I can say, that “not a drop of my blood runs in the veins of any living creature.” I must return to America, and breathe my last on that soil, where my most contented days were passed.”

The Chevalier never returned, however; he lingered away his time in the different seaports of France until death finally arrested his mortal career in the city of Bordeaux.